

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)

cordially invites you to a seminar on

**Methods of Analysis for Vernacular Character Texts:
Taking Complexity and Emergence into Account**

8 July 19, 4 pm to 8 pm

CSMC, room 2002

by

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Working together with Zhuang colleagues, David Holm has conducted a survey of the so-called Old Zhuang Script in 45 localities in Guangxi, Guizhou, eastern Yunnan, and northern Vietnam. Apart from various Zhuang subgroups, other Tai-speaking groups were also covered, including Bouyei, Maonam, Mulam, Sha, Nùng, and Tày. Unlike previous studies, this survey was based on whole texts or substantial text segments, and took traditional recitation by local priests or song kings as the starting point. The resulting data provide us with a powerful base from which to investigate a range of historical, linguistic and ethnological problems, including patterns of migration, dialect mixing, and relative dating. They also allow us to make hypotheses about the likely origins of manuscripts from unknown locations.

This seminar will be practical in orientation, describing the methods I use for the analysis of vernacular character manuscripts. Sub-topics will range from the details of graphic structure of individual glyphs, calligraphic style and stroke order; to methods of working with local informants and techniques of sound recording and interviewing; and on to transcription, word glossing, and annotation. Methods for determining the historical depth of various readings will also be discussed.

A key feature in this approach is that it leaves open the question of whether or not the Old Zhuang Script, or any other vernacular script, forms a “system”. Close attention to the social milieu in which knowledge of a particular script is transmitted often allows us to pinpoint innovations as well as continuities in graphic practice.